

## **Abstract**

This Bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of the development of the integration of Albania and Croatia into NATO structures. The first part describes the NATO open door policy along with the accession criteria and accession process. The key part is the analysis of whether and how the candidate states have fulfilled the established accession criteria based on the criteria of the NATO Enlargement Study, focusing in particular on selected factors – national political situation, public opinion, defence expenditure, professionalism, interoperability, diplomatic relations and cooperation with NATO, involvement in missions and relations with neighbouring states. It also examines the strategic interests of NATO in the Western Balkan region, and NATO may have been motivated by an attempt to strengthen its position in the Balkans. The outcome of the thesis is the assessment of the preparedness of the individual candidate states, where neither Albania nor Croatia fully met the accession criteria and the final decision of NATO was therefore more based on political judgment and strategy in the Balkans.